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ABSTRACT

Women in institutions of higher education who deserve special attention in advising situations include those with multiple responsibilities, those in under-represented fields, and reentry women. Factors that can help women be successful in an institutional setting are a supportive family and informal peer support groups. Stressors for women seem to be attached to their changing roles and conflicts with families. The advisor's role in assisting female students is to help them find resources that aid in the synthesis of their existing roles and their new roles as students and in the planning of educational programs that meet adults' short- and long-term needs. Female students in shared advising situations, as research indicates, receive six main benefits: (1) support; (2) cultivation of ideas; (3) inspiration; (4) divergent viewpoints; (5) reassurance; (6) help in defining and explaining ideas; and (7) getting encouragement and feedback from peers and the advisor at the same time. Four ways in which advisors can help female students prepare for accomplishment of course work have been identified: (1) encourage involvement in activities where female students may find mentors; (2) help students comprehend the process of progression to end goals; (3) refer students to appropriate help; and (4) assist students in learning to manage stress. (YLB)

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Academic Advising Services for Women in Higher Education

Submitted to

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Women, Learning and Leading in Education

by

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INTRODUCTION

Pick up any information on what it takes for a traditional age college student to succeed in the post-secondary environment, and academic advising will regularly appear as a necessity. Most college students receive the name of their advisor soon after they receive their letter of admission. A great deal of attention has been given to academic advising and the new freshman. The needs of freshmen entering a university can be found in any number of books, journals, and articles. Much of the literature about advising freshmen students even recognizes these students have social and adjustment issues that need to be addressed. It is also suggested that all college students may be tackling issues beyond the realm of academics and advisors should at least consider these issues when working with their students. Although actual advising programs vary greatly from one institution to the next, all colleges offer undergraduate advising services in some manner.

What happens when women return to school, either at the undergraduate or graduate level? Adult women are facing a whole different set of life situations than the average nineteen year old college student. Adult women fulfill many different roles; wife, mother, career professional, daughter, sister, and community member. Fitting college into these pre-existing roles can be a rather monumental challenge, one that needs help, guidance, and support. With the changing roles of women in society, this literature review seeks to ascertain what attention the field of academic advising has paid to the needs of women in the institutional environment?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The demographics of colleges and universities have been changing for many years, and continue to change even today. Today the student body make-up has been affected by career changes, the return of women to school, and the development of accessible community college systems (Pope, 1995).Women with many responsibilities appear to be the most rapidly increasing population, however they are also susceptible to role strain because of their many conflicting demands and continual overload (Home, 1998).

As society grows and changes, people too must adapt to those changes. Frost (1991), states that by the year 2000 seventy-five percent of the United States work force will need to be retrained to do their jobs. There is a high attrition rate for members of underrepresented groups at many different points in their career paths (Pope, 1995). There is an increasing interest in attracting underrepresented groups such as, women, into fields from which they were previously excluded (Pope, 1995). While their career unfolds, women especially in underrepresented fields, face many institutional barriers (Pope, 1995). Even though most barriers women face are organizational, women tend to blame themselves for the dilemmas they encounter instead of questioning whether the college or university role requirements are reasonable (Home, 1998).

Reentry women deserve special attention in advising situations (Gordon, 1992). There are concerns or problems unique to women such as: less time for family responsibilities, child care issues, arranging the family budget to allow for financing college, and working classes around a full-time work schedule to name a few (Gordon, 1992). Women with a multitude of roles can face lofty financial or social expenses, time and significance stresses, and often insufficient child care arrangements (Home, 1998). According to Home (1998), women must

also face such institutional barriers as inopportune scheduling times and locations, as well as inconveniences in regard to procedures such as residency requirements. According to Gordon, (1992), a supportive family is the greatest benefit to a returning woman student. Gordon (1992), goes on to suggest that advisors should advocate for orientation programs that include family members so they can all feel a part of the experience.

The use of informal peer support groups is another factor that can help women meet with success in an institutional setting (Conrad & Phillips, 1995). The arranging of these situations is something that can be facilitated by either individual advisors, faculty, or even administration at a college or university. According to Conrad and Phillips (1995) these groups can provide many services for their members; the students can swap and critique each other's writings before they are submitted to professors, they can provide technical assistance in regards to the workings of the college or university, and perhaps most importantly they can simply provide support and encouragement for each other.

The college experience can be particularly troubling for women who have never been employed outside the home before, or who have left employment many years previously (Gordon, 1992). These women need help identifying resources that will assist them in gathering information on what occupational options are available to them. In this situation, advisors need to be extra cautious not to encourage or discourage a career choice based on gender or age (Gordon, 1992). As the role of women in society grows and changes, women often find it difficult to cope with the conflicts they experience. Older females who once had a very distinct view of what their acceptable role was now, often feel conflicted about how they fit into the new possibilities (Archer, 1991). Stressors for women seem to be attached to their changing roles and

conflicts with families (Archer, 1991). For example, a women who returns to school after having raised her children, is likely to experience great stress over the change in her life role. Women in colleges and universities with lower incomes have reported having more stress and more complications meeting demands (Home, 1998). The advisor needs to be alert to these various needs and sensitive to how they relate to the person as a college student.

Advising services are especially important for women who are joining fields that have been permeated historically by men. According to Pope (1995), in a recent National Science Foundation study, the principal barrier perceived by women aspiring to a career in science or engineering was gender discrimination. In the aforementioned study, a full forty-one percent of participants reported they had experienced some form of gender discrimination in their career pursuits (Pope, 1995). To succeed in these specialties, Pope (1995) states women need a high level of motivation, persistence, and good coping skills. Fostering and encouraging women in underrepresented fields is an important function for the advisor to fill. Without a support system women will likely not meet with much success. Advisors of women students can help by advocating for a wide range of course schedules, and student service offerings (Home, 1998). Pope (1995), argues it is critical for all departments to provide support for female students so they can acquire the skills and self-assurance required for successful completion of their degrees, entry into graduate school, and/or entry into a productive professional life.

Frost (1991), states that adult, women college students should be of specific concern to advisors. Changing rules for women in the work force, increasing standards of living, acceptance of life-long learning, increasing requirements for occupational-related learning, are all factors that require adults to go back to college (Frost, 1991). Home, (1998), advocated the importance

of both perceived and received support for women students. Flexible scheduling, planning, time management, ongoing peer support, financial assistance, and counseling services should all be extended to women students according to Home (1998). Frost (1991), goes on to suggest that the advisor's role in assisting adult students is to help them find resources to assist in the synthesis of their existing roles and their new roles as students, and to assist in planning educational programs that meet the adults' short and long term needs.

According to Conrad and Phillips (1995), as early as 1976 it was noticed that women college students were principally prone to emotional stress. This propensity for stress was attributed to the lack of social contact women are exposed to in college and university institutions (Conrad & Phillips, 1995). Archer (1991), states that the female identity is different from males, females he argues are more interested in relationships, and the sharing of themselves. Using veteran women students to run orientation sessions for incoming women students with many roles, could help new women develop practical hopes and approaches that will help meet the demands of their numerous roles (Home, 1998). Conrad and Phillips (1995) describe a situation in which female students were grouped together based on the similarity of their thesis frameworks. These students met together with other students and their advisor, during their meetings they would report on the status of their thesis. As stated by Conrad and Phillips (1995), the students involved in these shared advising situations found the benefits to be many:

1. Support,
2. Help in accumulating materials,
3. Cultivation of ideas, inspiration,

4. Divergent viewpoint from others involved in the group.
5. A sense of a deadline and influence from the others to complete tasks.
6. Training in conceiving rationales quickly to respond to questions.
7. Elimination of being stuck with no ideas.
8. Reassurance while writing.
9. Help in defining and explaining ideas.

The individual students most appreciated the ability to receive encouragement and feedback from their peers and the advisor at the same time (Conrad & Phillips, 1995). This type of approach means less of a time commitment on the part of the advisor because they can combine advisee meetings (Conrad & Phillips, 1995).

As stated in Pope (1995), there are several things an advisor can do to help women students prepare for accomplishment of their course work:

1. Encourage students to become involved in activities where they might be likely to find mentors.
2. Help students comprehend the processes they must become involved in to progress toward their end goals.
3. Facilitate students knowledge of how to network.
4. Show that the advisor themselves are a human being and that it is possible to do many things well.
5. Refer students to appropriate campus help when needed.
6. Facilitate students learning and growth through the experiences of other women.

7. Assist students in learning how to deal with stressful situations.

In reviewing the literature for this project, I found much information about various special populations; student athletes, culturally diverse students, adults, disabled students, transfer students, undeclared students, professional students, and highly able students. However, I did not find a large quantity of material related specifically to advising women. According to Frost (1991), at least 13.2 million college students are older than twenty-five years of age. This population represents forty-two percent of all college students, fifty-eight percent of which are female, sixty-three percent are married, and seventy-one percent are employed full-time (Frost, 1991). With these enormously large percentages why are advising services for females absent from so much of the literature? As a female in a student role, I find there is a need for more to be studied in this area. As a professional, I also find there needs to be more time spent on this particular issue. What I did not find that I expected to, was a linking of the advising services on college and university campuses and the women's centers on those campuses. I wonder what the outcome would be if one was to link these two departments to provide a comprehensive advising program for female students.

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